

The English Leaflet

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THE TRAINING OF ENGLISH TEACHERS IN THE HARVARD GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Two designs are fundamental in the theory that has directed the formulation of the courses that are offered in the teaching of English in the Graduate School of Education.

Increase of the Student's Background. The first, the increase of the student's background, lays emphasis upon content and urges a constant enrichment of the student's knowledge of language and literature. To this end stimulus is provided for new acquisition, and illustrative material is freely chosen from literary selections that may possibly have escaped the careful notice of the ordinary student or teacher of English. Use is at the same time naturally made of those selections which are commonly taught in the English classes of the junior and senior high schools.

Methods of Instruction. The second design pertains to methods of instruction in grammar, composition and literature. The scope of the high-school course in English is so broad and the true aims so easily lost in daily routine and in hazy conceptions of method, that emphasis in the work in the training of English teachers is constantly placed upon that type of recitation management that sets up definite conceptions and objective standards, and provides suggestions for attaining these results definitely and economically.

The more elementary course examines fundamental principles that should determine the construction of the English curriculum; the articulation of high-school English with grammar-school English; the junior-high-school movement; the teaching of lyric poetry, drama, the novel, the short story, the essay, and the classics in translation. It likewise discusses the relationship of grammar, composition, and literature, with special attention to composition—oral and written. Such supplementary aids as periodical literature, dramatics, literary clubs, motion pictures, the school paper, debating,

prize speaking, assembly programs, the project method, and library work and equipment receive attention. Suggestions are offered for adjusting the English course to the needs of pupils in the commercial, trade, and industrial departments. Special attention is directed to the Better-English Movement.

A more intensive course confined to the study and teaching of literature, is designed for advanced students and experienced teachers. It emphasizes the study and interpretation of literary types. It considers in detail certain specific problems that arise in the teaching of secondary English, and discusses methods that have been found helpful in teaching the essay, the short story, the novel, lyric and dramatic poetry, and the modern prose drama. Early in the course each enrolled member chooses a topic for special investigation, the results to be embodied in a written report. Many of these reports have been published and have proved of general service to English teachers throughout the country. Students are encouraged to select their own topics; the following list is only suggestively offered.

1. A Study of Composition Scales.
2. The Approach Toward Uniformity in the Grading of Themes.
3. The Measurement of Results Establishing Specific Aims with Specific Literary Selections.
4. Minimum Standards for Each High School Grade.
5. Psychology as an Aid to English Teaching.
6. The Place of Grammar in the High School.
7. Specific Methods for Increasing a Pupil's Vocabulary.
8. Specific Methods for Increasing Variety and Elaboration of Sentence Forms.
9. Supervised Study of English.
10. The Equipment and Functions of the English Supervisor.
11. The School Play.
12. The Study of Modern Plays.
13. School Debating and other Forms of Public Speaking.
14. The Separation of Composition and Literature Courses.
15. Cooperation with Other Departments.
16. Cooperation and Articulation with the Grammar School.
17. Devices to Arouse Interest in Composition.
18. Certain Phases of Oral Composition.
19. Encouraging Pupils to Write Poetry.
20. Motion Pictures.

21. The Book-Club.
22. Journalistic Writing in the High School
23. The Bible in the English Course.
24. The English Teacher's Laboratory Equipment.
25. The Conference Period.
26. Planning an English Course for the Junior High School.
27. The Magazine and Newspaper in the Classroom.
28. Voice Training.
29. What we can Learn from the French Methods of Teaching French.
30. The Teaching of English in England.
31. Ethical and Social Values of the Literature Selection.
32. Aesthetic Values through Oral Interpretation.
33. The Better English Movement.
34. What the War has Taught the English Teacher.
35. The Dominant Literary Appeals in High School English Classes.

As a variant to the foregoing, a course in the Teaching of Poetry is offered in alternate years. This course is designed to increase and deepen the student's knowledge and appreciation of the spirit and form of poetry and to show how poetry may be effectively taught to students. While there is considerable emphasis upon technique, the constant aim is to keep this subordinate to the spirit and message of poetry. The selections to be studied include epic, dramatic, and lyric poetry, with more particular emphasis upon the lyric. There is special consideration given to the study of the more conventional feet, meters, and stanzas, and their effective use by poets of established renown. There is likewise considerable stress placed upon the revolt from these conventions and the current attitude that finds expression in free verse and imagist poetry. As a means of study and appreciation and to provide incentive for creative work, opportunity is given for the writing and criticism of original verse.

It is the preconceived aim of those directing the work in these courses to construct a sound theory of the purpose of the study of English and induce an analysis of methods designed to achieve the desired objectives. The concrete problems of the classroom are therefore kept constantly in view; attempts to solve them are made in the light of modern theory and experiment.

SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AESTHETIC APPRECIATION THROUGH ORAL INTERPRETATION

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I

The aim of literary study is two-fold, dealing with the ethical content—the ideals and standards of the race, and with the æsthetic values—the realization of the beautiful. The more fundamental values are the ethical, and those are the ones making the strongest immediate appeal to the young student, just beginning to get his outlook on life. Therefore it is the purpose of this paper to deal only with the problem of teaching æsthetic values, and to consider some ways in which æsthetic appreciation may be developed through oral interpretations. By oral interpretation is here meant class discussion, irrespective of whether the idea is brought out by teacher or pupil, with the warning that the teacher should contribute nothing that can better be given by the pupil. This problem is not so difficult as it might seem, for it is human nature to want to share pleasures, and only the finer pleasures are really sharable; therefore—once the æsthetic appreciation is awakened—class discussion is natural. For purposes of the present consideration, we shall assume a class whose capacity for appreciation is latent, and we shall not mention to them the word “æsthetic,” but we shall try to devise some means to throw open the doors of their minds to a world of beauty.

There are two traits in such a student to be counted on: his prejudice against lyric poetry, and his desire to know real life. Fortunately for our problem, literature “raises the pitch of real life” in prose as well as in poetry; so the natural starting point is the epic or the short story. The glory-service motive of “Beowulf” appeals to him, and while he studies the epic for adventure, he subconsciously appreciates the figures by which the Old English point of view is given to him: the sun is not the “torch” of heaven, as with the Greeks, but the “candle” of heaven; the sea is the “gannet’s bath”; the mariners follow the “whale paths of the sea.” Seeing with the eyes of the Old English bard has already begun to reveal the world of beauty. Here, as in every work studied, the power to visualize must be constantly developed—that power which is fundamental to all appreciation, but which has been sadly dulled of late by the dependence of young

people on the moving pictures to accomplish their visualization for them.

II

The art of character drawing may be studied in the short story, in which character revelation is at its clearest and frequently its most dramatic. Character interest may also be stimulated by the study of the familiar essay, in which the chief charm lies in the personality of the writer—his habits, his prejudices, his more or less whimsical view of life. Perhaps this form of literature enables the student most easily to begin merging himself in the writer, and entering in some measure “into coincident thinking and feeling” with him.

The drama affords still richer opportunity for character appreciation; here the student must not only *see*, but must *be* the character. The consequent increase of his own sense of sympathy and capacity is, in itself, an æsthetic experience, and tends to break down the old prejudice and self-consciousness. Through acting—if only a single part in a single scene—he will begin to get an idea of the importance to plot and character development and contrast, of each word and tone, and will therefore enter upon his appreciation of unity—perhaps the most satisfying æsthetic element. The study of plot crisis helps to emphasize this unity and can be well brought out through such simple plots as Lord Dunsany’s “Lost Silk Hat” and Lady Gregory’s “Workhouse Ward,” and is superbly illustrated by the crisis, *off the stage*, in “Much Ado About Nothing.” This play might also serve as an introduction to lyric poetry, for it is a dull student who does not catch the beauty of Beatrice’s emotional speech after she has been tricked:

“What fire is in mine ears! Can this be true?

Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much?”

in contrast with the renowned prose of Benedick’s, “This is no trick; the conference was sadly borne.”

III

Indeed the enjoyment of lyric poetry is not so foreign to the student as he pretends to himself that it is. He is young—therefore he is at the age of dreams and adventure, and poetry is the language of both. It is sometimes well to begin the study of lyric poetry with the ballad, in which the natural response to adventure leads to appreciation of the story first, and then to the art of the telling of it—the masterly reserve,

the repetition, suggestion, description, the simple satisfying music of the stanza. It is helpful to have one student sing dramatically some of the "Lonesome Tunes" recently collected in the Kentucky Mountains by Howard Brockway and Lorraine Wyman, to emphasize the simple, singing quality of the ballads he has come to enjoy. With a class of girls, it is effective to read—as introductory to the study of this lyric—Kate Douglas Wiggin's introduction to "Golden Numbers," in which she admits (in charming, poetic style) that the fairy Fine-Ear was absent from the cradles of some children when the other fairies gave their gifts, but that the loss need not be total, for the ear can be trained. This usually arouses the natural desire not to miss anything, and the old prejudice against lyrics as mere "odes to grasshoppers" is forgotten.

Proper curiosity regarding meters may be aroused by listening to the clock-tick and disputing the rhythm; by humming a march and finding it to be iambic and giving a stanza in marching iambs to prove the fitness of the meter; by recalling the beat of trotting hoofs and discovering it to be archaic; recognizing that the dreamy waltz is dactylic, and the gallop of a horse anapæstic. Follow each discovery with a characteristic illustration from a well-known poem, and meters become just natural labels of long appreciated rhythms.

Aside from rhythm, the great qualities of lyric poetry are unity, imagery, and tone-color. There are two kinds of unity, one showing the underlying unity of experiences and conceptions that seem widely diverse; the other, the unity due to the elimination of all ideas not intimately bound up with the central idea. Of the latter, the sonnet is the example. It has been called "the crystallization of a single thought or emotion," but the definition holds almost as well for the lyric in general. Take Dryden's "Ode for Saint Cecilia's Day" as an example of unity in variety: written to celebrate the majestic harmony of the organ's roll, it brings out, in marvellous onomatopœia, "the double, double, double beat of the thundering drum," the "trumpet's loud clangor," and the "soft complaining flute," and makes all these sounds contribute to "the sacred organ's praise." The class will disagree with some of Dryden's musical conceptions, such as "sharp violins," and it will be well to have them give their own descriptive phrases, to develop their sense of tone-color. In a larger field, the beauty of unity is revealed through the study of a great play—for instance, "King Lear," in which two plots, inex-

tricably tangled, show perfect unity. Each revelation of unity in complexity or diversity is life-enhancing because it brings the student nearer the discovery of the ultimate unity and simplicity of life's reality.

IV

Perhaps the quality most lightly held at first, and most richly enjoyed at last, is imagery. Here, as always, we must connect the sensuous experience of the past with the student's own experience. Open his eyes to hitherto unnoticed elements in every-day scenes—color on snow and cumulus clouds and in a rain-swept street between towering sky-scrappers—and have him frequently write one-sentence descriptions conveying to the class his vivid impressions, and he will cease to resent poetic diction as not “straight to the point.” Let him linger over the various appeals in Miss De Luce's lyric.

COLOR

Throughout the year, whatever time, I feel
That beauty must bespeak Love.
Yet how shall I portray it? Through June sunshine
Spilling notes of gold, June roses faintly flushed,
Of fragrance rare; June's arch of sky, laid deep on deep,—
June's promise brooding? Or in autumn, time of glad
fulfillment.

When bushes burn and branches bend
Beneath the weight of Love's bestowal?
Through fire of radiant day or black of night?
In glint of desert sand or pearl of rain or opalescence of
the sea?

I cannot choose. I only know, whatever time, I feel
That color must reveal Love.

He will also discover, with a little guidance, that his every-day expressions are characterized by figures: when he is excited with wrath he “sees red,” the street climber “puffs like a porpoise,” the pretty girl is a “peach”; his slang—of which he will furnish excellent examples—almost invariably started as vigorous figures. Similarly, his emotion tends to express itself in repetition, and often in rhythm; “Go it! Go it!” “Stop him! Stop him!” “What a fool! What a fool! What a fool!” It is worth while to test his sense of rhythm and tone-color by reading, dramatically, “The Jabberwock,” which Bliss Perry calls “the body of poetry stripped of its soul.” With the senses thus stimulated it will not be difficult in the end to achieve a real appreciation of the exquisite poetry of Shelley and Keats. “We needs must love the highest when we see it,” said Tennyson of character, and it is true of beauty also.

Only let us be very sure that the students see it for themselves, not through our eyes and over-enthusiasms.

Throughout the course the student should, almost daily, memorize phrases or passages notable for their imagery and their tone-color, and should occasionally attempt imitations of beautiful form and style. He should never be left with mere analysis, but after any necessary dissection of a poem should finally (if possible, unconsciously) synthesize it before leaving it. The teachers can give a great impulse to the enjoyment of poetry by seizing every chance to read poetry—new or old—to the class. In all these ways will be accomplished that enrichment of the spirit which Parker says is “The distinct purpose of art,” and the teacher will be one of whom it may be said, as it has recently been said of Miss Jordan—recently retiring after long service at Smith College: “She released our faculties; she was a great teacher.”

IS THE SOCIALIZED ENGLISH RECITATION A SUCCESS?

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I

After three years of English teaching in a small school where classes were of a size to make semi-circle informal recitations possible, this last half-year I taught a group of thirty-five freshmen in a large high school. In the former school no emphasis was placed upon the form of the recitation, but the small number of pupils to a class and the general atmosphere of the school certainly fostered a social spirit. Personally, I believe the form of the socialized recitation cannot be adopted without sacrificing valuable objectives of the English course—though I realize it may be somewhat more of a problem to maintain the social spirit without the form in a class of thirty-five than in one of eight to twelve pupils.

Children are in school in order that they may acquire a certain understanding of life—that by it they may fit themselves into the world as they find it. When they leave they should have some vocational training, a background of social civic principles which would integrate them with the social life of their community and country, and finally, certain tastes, capacities for enjoyment and appreciation of the finer

things of life, that their own lives may be fuller and their leisure time well spent.

It is obvious that both content and method should be considered to give the child the breadth of understanding, adaptability and economic efficiency necessary to make him a good citizen. Each subject in the curriculum, however, must maintain its place there as contributing vitally to his development and character. Method must be considered primarily from the viewpoint of whether it teaches the subject.

II

The teaching methods which are used with the aim of giving the child a knowledge of the subject must at the same time not be contrary to a principle of co-operation and of normal natural participation of all in the activity of the school community. If we are to prepare children for life in the different ways we have enumerated, it is clear that the school must be as nearly like the world into which they later go as men and women as possible.

It is very true that frequently teaching methods have not been social in spirit in the past. The teacher has been the despot ruling in his small domain. The atmosphere of the class and method of handling the subject have not been such as to fit the child for efficient membership in a democratic community. English has suffered as much as any other subject. Yet English, above all others, perhaps, can prove a claim of invaluable service to the individual. In the first place, English as a language is of social origin. Individuals found they could by vocal sounds communicate more intelligibly with each other. They later expressed these sounds in written symbols. Our language, oral and written, is therefore primarily social.

In the past the English teacher has often forgotten to motivate the language work through this desire for communication with our fellow-beings. The recitations have been largely between the teacher and one pupil, rather than the activity of the whole class. The written work, too, has been divorced from any natural interest. There are innumerable topics on which children may be expected to have thoughts of their own, but they have been laid by in favor of stereotyped, lifeless subjects.

Literature is a record of fascinating human experiences. Children love a story. The object of the literature course is to give the child ideals, a certain knowledge of common cus-

toms and thought of the country, and a taste for the best writing as a source of pleasure for himself. Older teaching methods, while recognizing these values, insured their loss by detailed philological study of literature.

Owing to these great defects in the teaching of English—and of other subjects as well—the pendulum several years ago swung in the opposite direction. The result has been the socialized recitation. The question now is, Does this method give the child the necessary command of the subject?

III

In the school in which I taught for a short time this year the socialized recitation was used whenever possible in the English class. At least during the literature meetings of the week a leader was appointed. He or she then assigned topics on which all were to be prepared the following day. When the class met, the leader taking charge called upon different members for brief oral delivery of the topics. The children were free to comment after each speaker had finished. The book which they were reading at the time was "Tom Brown's School Days." The lesson was a chapter a day to be retold carefully in class. When each member had given the bit of the story which his topic covered, the others arose in friendly criticism of the sentence form and grammatical errors. Then time would be spent deciding some such trivial question as to whether Tom had had cold or hot meat for breakfast at the inn en route to school. On the whole, these lessons did not seem to me worth while. The correction of grammatical and sentence-form mistakes took up more time than was warranted by the lack of improvement which followed, and the story of Tom Brown did not merit the minute attention given to its retelling.

For the next few weeks we tried having the class bring in thought questions which called for more than a mere repetition of the story. The leader then called upon each one for a question and upon another for a reply to it. Many of the questions were poor, and the leader—unless I constantly interrupted—did not pursue the idea to a satisfactory conclusion. On my part I usually felt a decided interloper whenever I tried to direct the procedure. Perhaps I would not have felt that way had I been their regular teacher.

From this brief experience with the socialized method I believe that first-year students, at least, do not get the benefit which it is supposed to insure. The lessons were not clean-cut

and clear, and frequently wandered off on trivial points. A very clever teacher—of which there are all too few—may be able to whip a freshman high school class into form capable of handling a worth-while recitation of this kind, and herself by daily suggestions keep them from degenerating again. I could not do it.

It would seem that if the teacher is the most able member of the class—the most capable of directing the thought and discussion—she should be the centre and in direct control at all times. This does not mean that she must sit or stand in any one part of the room. She may be in the rear or anywhere among the children. The informal arrangement of desks and chairs makes contact with each child—and among the children—far easier. But whatever the arrangement and wherever the teacher, the children's discussion should include her constantly. The teacher should keep the interchange of thought going between herself and each pupil, and between pupil and pupil.

IV

But again we hear the claim that the socialized form develops a spirit of co-operation and an ability to lead, so useful in out-of-school life. We would reply that it is a very simple matter to give a class opportunity for co-operation under the leadership of the teacher. And what child who has them will not quickly develop the qualities of the leader without special training? Is there not even a danger that he may become too officious? Can we ever hope, or is it even desirable, to train all to be leaders? Do we not rather seek a rational understanding for all and leadership for the few? The former is to be had through a thorough knowledge of the subject matter imparted to the children by the teacher, and the latter will develop in countless ways, especially in extra-curricula activities.

It seems therefore that when the first enthusiasm for the so-called socialized recitation has had a fair trial in its worthy attempt to motivate the lesson through class activity and interest, it will be found that the spirit of the socialized class may be retained and even more successfully secured when the teacher herself is the leader. Who has not seen the student-conducted class where the lazy student slides down in his seat and does not offer to contribute to the hour's discussion? As a matter of fact the real interest is still shown by the few always wide-awake members of the group. The

pupil leader is never as agile at prodding on the lazy or helping the weak as the teacher herself would be. Above all, the subject matter would be more adequately handled by her, since she has supposedly been trained for that purpose. The subject rather than the method is her aim, yet the latter can be in harmony with democratic principles.

If English is brought into closer relation to its actual use in the life of the child, we need not fear that the social atmosphere will be absent. Let him write for the sake of communication by means of real letters to be mailed. Let him entertain his classmates with story form. In grammar work emphasize the function of correct speech, not the knowledge of textbook rules. Every child is ambitious to become somebody. Let him see that all the able and successful members of society have a good language tool. In the study of literature avoid the detailed analysis which kills interest, and seek rather to bring the child into contact with as many experiences, high ideals, national thoughts and customs as the brief time allotted you will permit. With these principles in mind, can we not train the child to be a good citizen as far as English alone is able to do so?

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

SUMMER SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES AND OF EDUCATION

July 2-August 11, 1923

Two courses in The Teaching of English, to be given by Charles Swain Thomas, Lecturer on the Teaching of English, Harvard University, and Editor of the Educational Department of the Atlantic Monthly Press. Mr. Thomas, the editor of this Leaflet, is the author of "The Teaching of English in the Secondary School," Houghton Mifflin Company, and is widely known for his work as a teacher and supervisor in Newton, Massachusetts, and in Cleveland, Ohio.

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